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Source: *Journal of Austrian Studies*, SUMMER 2014, Vol. 47, No. 2, Special Issue on Habsburg Nostalgia (SUMMER 2014), pp. 17-36

Published by: University of Nebraska Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43947309

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Maria Theresa, "The Turk," and Habsburg Nostalgia

Elizabeth Bridges

Let us indulge our imaginations for a moment: Picture Vienna in 1770, an opulent visitation room in Schönbrunn Palace on a crisp spring evening. Empress Maria Theresa, now in the last quarter of her reign, sits in a stately seat with several members and visitors of the court around her. Wolfgang von Kempelen, a royal engineer from Pressburg in the Kingdom of Hungary, wheels out a large wooden cabinet topped with a chessboard. On one side of the cabinet in an attached chair sits the figure of a Turk, decked out in a turban and Oriental-style robes with ermine trim, holding a long pipe in one hand, his chin resting in a thoughtful pose over the chessboard. Von Kempelen turns the cabinet so that everyone can see it from all angles as he introduces the figure as "der Schachtürke." He makes a show of exposing the cabinet's inner workings, opening various doors to reveal a complex array of gears and clockwork installed in its interior. Von Kempelen holds up a candle so that the courtly audience can see through the densely packed machinery from one side of the cabinet to the other. It becomes plain that there can be no room for trickery here. The engineer even lifts the chess player's robe to show the back of the figure, clearly revealing the mechanical workings of the Turk himself. The figure is also too small to house a human inside. With practiced showmanship, von Kempelen challenges a member of the audience to a game of chess against the automaton. A gentleman volunteers, and von Kempelen removes the Turk's pipe to give the automaton a free hand to play the game. Then he proceeds to wind the whole mechanism with a large key. He backs away, and the mechanical figure springs to life and begins to move, seemingly on his own. The whole gathering gasps in unison, and the game

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plays out in front of the astonished group. The Turk continues to move independently, with little intervention by the exhibitor other than the winding of the clockwork every few moves. The audience hangs on every moment of the game. The Turk wins and becomes the instant talk of the court and soon the whole of Vienna. Maria Theresa herself is delighted by von Kempelen's ingenious invention. Everyone concludes that the mechanical man must be some kind of trick, but the most dedicated skeptics in the room are themselves confounded, even after multiple exhibitions by von Kempelen over the following weeks. Whispers of magic, magnetism, and mesmerism abound.

Although the details of this encounter have not made it into prominent studies of Maria Theresa or the Habsburgs, the existence of the chess-playing Turk has been documented many times over as one of history's most fabulous hoaxes. In the following, I will explore elements of nostalgia surrounding this strange phenomenon known simply as "the Turk," an automaton chess player that debuted in Maria Theresa's court in 1770, followed by exhibitions in the capitals of Europe over the next two decades. Created by Hungarian court engineer Wolfgang von Kempelen, who also built the famed fountains at Schönbrunn and invented a digging machine for the construction of canals, the Turk was, as the original audience suspected, an ingenious illusion. In fact, von Kempelen's creation continued to confound skeptics for decades.

Part of the Turk's power as "perhaps the preeminent entertainer of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" and "a genuine international celebrity" stems from the nexus of potent Enlightenment-era contrasts that this one figure embodied: discourses of science and reason versus "magic" and superstition, human versus machine, and not least "Europe" versus "the Orient" and the religious and cultural contrasts that this entailed (Cook 31). The Turk's stereotypically "Oriental" appearance was in vogue in Vienna at the time, and coupled with the overall playful presentation in court exhibitions, the figure reflected the changing image of the Ottomans that had developed during the relative peace after the 1739 Treaty of Belgrade. Yet, drawing on the living memory and generations-old representations of bloody conflicts between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, the Turk's appearance would have also invoked opposing, equally powerful associations of Turks as warlike, inscrutable, and anti-Christian. We can thus "read" the Turk as a cultural text of his time, in that his appearance, the circumstances and methods of von

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Kempelen's presentation, and the historical discourses surrounding the figure all contribute to a coherent narrative of this particular moment in Austria's history in general and Maria Theresa's reign in particular. Meanwhile, the game of chess, like any game scenario, also provides a narrative premise: in this case a story of royal adversaries navigating a series of moves and countermoves in order to achieve dominance, a process of gaining and ceding territory, a subtle battle of wit and intellect. In Maria Theresa's context, we can apply this premise to the machinations going on between parties within the House of Habsburg or to the Habsburgs' history of wars against the Ottomans.

These mock battles on von Kempelen's chessboard, first staged in the Habsburg court, may thus be said to reflect nostalgia for a then-recent past. One might even suppose that they served as a chance to reenact, and in simulation, reimagine and redeem a defeat, whereby Maria Theresa's father Charles VI had been forced to cede territories he had gained from the Ottomans. Yet, as we will see, this nostalgic game also presents a "fort-da" proposition that compulsively rehearses an ultimately unwinnable scenario on multiple levels: historical, philosophical, and aesthetic. Viewed in terms of the specific time and place of its creation and debut in the context of chess as a game of royal houses pitted against one another, the automaton also serves as a nexus of mixed nostalgic and fearful associations with the Ottoman world that existed in Austria at that time. However, beyond a nostalgic wish for a few regained territories and continual redemption or bolstering of the family legacy, the Turk also provides us a template for examining later forms of Habsburg nostalgia, in that the deployment of the automaton offered the pleasurable opportunity to relive and experience, in simulated form, a triumphal moment in an imagined past as an escape from a more mundane and troubling present. This dynamic is present, at least implicitly, in all nostalgic texts, because, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, "If the present is considered irredeemable, you can look either back or forward. The nostalgic and utopian impulses share a common rejection of the here and now" (Hutcheon 204). As a simulated human that presents a kind of reenactment scenario in game form, the Turk doubly highlights the element of artifice and simulation that characterizes all nostalgic texts, whether in film, print, or material culture.

Nostalgia as Illness and Cure

"By the narrative process of nostalgic reconstruction, the present is denied and the past takes on an authenticity of being, an authenticity which, ironical-

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ly, it can only achieve through narrative" (Stewart 23). This citation from *On Longing*, Susan Stewart's study of "the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection," explains nostalgia as a wish to reach a constantly receding horizon of originary experience, or "authenticity," which can only be relayed in narrative form, or "visited" through brushes with everyday objects stemming from a particular time and place. The Turk is one such object, having much in common with the toys, automata, and souvenirs treated by Stewart in her work.

Before delving into a discussion of the Turk and his relationship to nostalgia, the historical construction of the concept itself requires some consideration. Linda Hutcheon and Linda M. Austin have produced complementary histories of nostalgia, a concept first identified in the late seventeenth century as a disease that mainly afflicted soldiers and sailors serving for long periods far away from their home countries or regions (Austin 7–10; Hutcheon 193). Medical case studies described it as a psychosomatic disease with real medical symptoms such as stomach pains, insomnia, and constipation. It presented as an advanced version of homesickness, characterized by an *idée fixe* from which no relief appeared possible (Austin 7–10). Austin notes the growing awareness and study of nostalgia as a disease in the 1760s and 1770s, although Linda Hutcheon dates its origin much earlier. Austin credits Friedrich Schiller, author and physician, with bringing about the historical transition between the original understanding of nostalgia as a medical condition and later as a mode of aesthetic perception (5). Regarding Schiller's plan of "recreational therapy" for a severely nostalgic patient named Grammont, she writes:

> As Schiller represented his treatment of the patient, the obsessive and intense state of the tortured nostalgic mind shifted to the recreational nostalgic body, one that replaced obsessive and uncontrolled mental functions with free and pleasurable sensuous activity. The case of Grammont thus stands as a paradigm for nostalgia in transition: it depicts a shift from internal torment to external relief, from the associative impasse that defined the affliction into an enactment of memory, one that would characterize its pleasurable, modern forms. In a substitution of (physiological) remembering for (cerebral) memory, the patient released blocked and obsessive thoughts of home by rehearsing the return in a representative space. In this rehearsal,

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> the countryside substituted for the native community, thereby illustrating the therapeutic function of a literary tradition within the annals of medicine. (11)

Schiller effected a "cure" for nostalgia not through the more mechanical medical treatments of his time but rather through therapeutic experience—in this case several visits to a countryside locale similar to the patient's childhood home—and through the opportunity to reconstruct and relive those memories in simulation. Austin goes on to explain how Schiller would "rework this treatment in aesthetic terms" in his influential theories of art as naïve versus sentimental (11). She refers to Grammont's therapy as a "rehearsal of return" that served to "illustrate the cathartic function of representation" (14). The reconstruction of an originary, homelike experience for the patient corresponds to the sentimental poet's conscious efforts to reinscribe a lost connection to nature that modernity has diminished. In other words, Schiller can be credited with linking the original, medical usage of the term to its later aesthetic usage in describing texts that also seek to reconstruct a sense of wholeness to counteract the modern subject's disconnected state.

Although we no longer use the term *nostalgia* as the name of a disease in itself—perhaps today nostalgia of the above medical magnitude would be diagnosed as major depression or generalized anxiety disorder—the familiar sense of longing that characterizes the modern aesthetic usage nevertheless carries with it something of the home*sickness* from the original meaning. The "cathartic function of representation" is therefore also tied up in our modern understanding of nostalgia. We find nostalgic texts attractive because they bring back pleasurable feelings and memories associated with a particular time, place, or experience—if not from our own "home" or time per se, then nevertheless from a past context that holds some specific personal or cultural meaning. Indeed, nostalgic reconstructions trigger further symptoms of nostalgia (longing, a sense of lack, a sense of temporal "homesickness") and also provide elements of a cure not unlike that proposed by Schiller (a narrative rehearsal of the time or place, a simulated nostalgic experience).

Yet, with nostalgia understood in this context as a quasi-illness, Susan Stewart's characterization of "nostalgic reconstruction" through narrative posits only a partial or temporary cure. As a relief from the tension created by longing for a particular time, place, or experience, the narrative reconstruction or experiential simulation of that "authentic" experience can provide

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only glimpses of the originary moment or time period (14). Like the audiences of the Turk's chess games, consumers of nostalgic texts are treated to an illusion—in fact, willingly so. After all, the Turk's spectators did not, by all accounts, fully believe that they were seeing an actual automaton, but part of the pleasure in viewing such an illusion is the inability to see behind it, which allows the viewer to immerse herself in the "magic" of what is displayed on stage. Similarly, the nostalgic text creates an illusion, in this case one that allows audiences to "time travel" via memory and affect. But of course, regardless of how effective the illusion, representation remains representation. It is in this sense that nostalgia and its would-be cure evince Stewart's posited denial of the present in favor of a golden age in a past that has no present reality and may never have existed in the first place. In the sense that Susan Stewart describes it, nostalgia is a "dis-ease" of memory, one that we willingly contract in anticipation of a pleasurable cure.

It is here that Linda Hutcheon's analysis of nostalgia becomes especially useful. In addition to the aesthetic dimension of nostalgic texts as incomplete but pleasurable reconstructions, she also emphasizes the temporal and psychological dimensions of the nostalgic experience that render nostalgia ultimately "incurable," as hinted at above (194). Time travel is, of course, also a fantasy, because "[t]ime, unlike space, cannot be returned to—ever; time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact" (194). Therefore, nostalgia creates a cognitive dissonance, predicated on the dual awareness of two incongruent time periods. Hutcheon concludes that, the power of nostalgia "comes in part from its structural doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past" (198). The game of chess also requires a state of doubled temporal awareness, both within the game itself and in relation to one's opponent, in much the same sense that Hutcheon describes. During a game one must keep track simultaneously of past moves, the current status of the board, and an array of possible future countermoves in response to one's present choice. Part of the preparation for an upcoming match involves researching an opponent's past games as a way to predict his or her mode of play in particular scenarios. In very meaningful ways, the game of chess simulates not only wars but also the more subtle machinations that accompany political negotiations more generally. Thus in the case of the Turk in Maria Theresa's court, and particularly the time surrounding 1770 (to be detailed more fully below), the power dynamics of

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chess against the Turk not only posited a nostalgic illusion but also mirrored Maria Theresa's own political situation in the present.

Automata

Although the feats of the Turk were, like the nostalgic experience, pure illusion, automata were nevertheless real. In the mid- to late eighteenth century, Europeans became obsessed with these curious mechanical simulations of humans and animals engaged in a variety of activities. These animatronic attractions emerged from the Enlightenment with its confident quest for rational laws to explain everything from the movements of bodies in the heavens to the movements of microscopic cells in the bodies of human beings. In the natural sciences, this quest for the rational led to the conclusion that the human body functions as a machine, an idea first popularized by Descartes in the seventeenth century in his *Discourse on Method* and reiterated in his writings on *The World*: "I suppose the body to be just a statue or a machine made of earth" (99). He maintains nevertheless the concept of the human soul as the "ghost" in that machine, separate from the substance that composes it. However, this idea was taken to its materialist extreme in 1747 by Julien Offray de la Mettrie in his best known work *Machine Man* when he stated that "[t]he human body is a machine which winds itself up, a living picture of perpetual motion" (6). He concludes, "I believe thought to be so little incompatible with organised matter that it seems to be one of its properties, like electricity, motive power, impenetrability, extension, etc." (35). He thereby implies that the body/soul dualism posited by Descartes was false. The experience of mind was linked directly to the body and could be explained entirely in physical, material terms. This philosopher and medical doctor thus inferred that the complexities of the human body could be fully explained through the laws of mechanics, and our existence as purely physical rather than metaphysical.

In mechanical engineering and physics, this line of thinking was inspired by and inspired the construction of increasingly realistic human and animal automata, designed to imitate—or perhaps to serve as the perfected image of—the movement and other physical functions of their living counterparts (Sauer 19). And although today we might find it difficult to fathom, given what is now common knowledge about the complexity of the human brain and its interaction with the intricate systems of the body, those scientists and mechanics of a materialist bent in the eighteenth century believed quite literally that, given adequate insight into the laws of human physiology, it would

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be possible to construct independently functioning human facsimiles in their own day. Indeed, some set out to do just that. As La Mettrie put it, "[T]o make a speaking machine [. . .] can no longer be considered impossible, particularly at the hands of a new Prometheus" (34). The French word used for these automata, *androïdes* ("human-like"), both captures the spirit of what these inventors sought and anticipates the science fiction concept of the android or cyborg that developed in the following century.

Among the most famous automata were those of Jacques de Vaucanson, whose most renowned creations included a realistic, life-sized duck (1739), which was said to have inspired La Mettrie's philosophical writings a decade later (Tietzel 42). Besides being able to flap its wings, walk, and move its head, Vaucanson's synthetic duck was also said to mimic the physiological functions of an actual duck. Eventually, thousands of spectators flocked from across Europe to observe the artificial bird eating grain, apparently digesting it through a series of tubes and a small oven in its belly, and finally excreting the remains. Other famous automata included a boy who could write simple, prescribed messages on a tablet and a piano-playing girl, both displayed by the Swiss father and son team of Pierre and Henri-Louis Jacquet-Droz in 1774 (Bedini 39; Tietzel 42). More infamous than famous was von Kempelen's chess-playing Turk, which, according to eyewitnesses, was so astonishing that it aroused immediate suspicion. However, its ingenious construction inspired but defied countless attempted explanations for decades. According to the first in a collection of several published letters by Karl Gottlieb von Windisch to a friend and fellow skeptic,

> Sie haben, sagen Sie, schon so viel über diese Maschine gehört, gedacht, und gelesen, dennoch aber Ihre Wißbegierde weder beruhigen, noch sich von der der Möglichkeit einer so unglaublichen Sache überzeugen können. Aber, wundern Sie sich nicht, mein Bester; denn mir, der ich sie schon so oft gesehen, untersucht, und mit ihr gespielet habe, geht es eben so nicht besser; da, zum Trotze meiner Eigenliebe auch andern nicht, denen ich immer mehrere Kentniße, und tiefere Einsichten zutrauen muß. Denn, unter einigen tausend Menschen hat es noch keiner errathen, wie das alles zugehet. (Windisch 8)

Similarly, another published account from 1784 by Karl Friedrich Hindenburg of Leipzig expresses the questionable nature of the Turk's appearance as an

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"authentic machine" but also the lack of a plausible explanation for its seemingly autonomous movements:

> Man giebt einstimmig zu, daß die Bewegungen des Schachspielers sehr ungezwungen und natürlich sind; nur über die Art und Weise, wie sie hervorgebracht werden, kann man sich nicht vereinigen. Einige glauben, alles geschehe ganz unmechanisch durch unmittelbare Einwirkung einer Kraft von aussen: Andere hingegen finden hier einen sehr künstlichen Mechanismus. (Hindenburg 3–4)

It was first fully confirmed decades later—in 1834—that the cabinet auspiciously housing the Turk's inner workings in fact contained multiple compartments behind what appeared to be complex machinery, very cleverly concealing a chess whiz who moved the Turk's arms with the aid of a series of mirrors and pulleys (Sauer 23).

All of these automata, the Turk included, functioned simultaneously as sideshow attractions and scientific wonders, widely viewed and even more widely renowned throughout much of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth (Sauer 23; Rice 5). Their realistic appearance and actions, which included such lifelike features as the appearance of breathing via complex bellows mechanisms and even blinking eyes, brought accusations more sinister than the Prometheus referenced by La Mettrie but rather talk of Faustian pacts with the Devil (Rice 5). First displayed as amusements for the royal courts of Europe, these automata also served as proof of the scientific and engineering prowess of a given country. After losing their popularity in courtly circles, automata soon became touring public exhibitions, the original scientific motivation giving way to showmanship, spectacle, and profit. The notoriety of these automata and their celebrity inventors motivated several notorious hoaxes, the chess-playing Turk being the best known example.

The Ottomans, "Turkish Chic," and Chess

The specific choice of a Turk as the embodiment of the exotic warrants some discussion. Its particular context in the cultural and historical landscape of late eighteenth-century Austria serves to illustrate the changing relationship to the Muslim world that emerged in that period as well as perceptions of Austria as a "liminal space" between Europe and the Orient (Yonan 136). Granted, the chess player's existence as a national symbol of the Empire's

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technological prowess embodied in the guise of a traditional military and religious enemy would seem to invite an unambiguous interpretation of this figure as a twofold symbol of national triumph. Yet a closer examination of the circumstances surrounding the creation and deployment of this automaton will show how the figure serves as a site of intersection between competing images of "Turkishness"—and the Muslim world in general—that pervaded the eighteenth-century European mindset and continued to color it far beyond that period.

It is important for us to remember that "the Turk" was the predominant European visual referent to the Muslim world up until the nineteenth century (Wheatcroft, *Infidels* 260). In his account of European interactions with Islam, historian Andrew Wheatcroft details how particular images of Muslims, especially just prior to the eighteenth century, became crystallized in the European imagination. He states that "the view of the Islamic world in the West was largely *imprinted* during the two centuries after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. This period coincided with the development and spread of the printed word and image in the West" (*Infidels* 260, emphasis in original). He proposes that these images became "fixed, in the sense that a photographic image is chemically 'fixed' and made permanent, by [these] printed images" (*Infidels* 273). He cites numerous encyclopedias, travelogues, and woodcut prints contained in widely circulating chapbook editions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, all proliferating more or less the same image of Muslim men (and more rarely, women) as stereotypically Turkish. The ubiquitous turban or other exotic headgear, robes, crescent, and scimitar or spear are repeated visual signifiers of "the Turk" in these images. All of these accessories speak of the exotic and the foreign, the weapons of an alien and merciless cruelty (*Infidels* 263). Wheatcroft counts these items, especially the turban and scimitar, as "the fundamental visual signature of the Turk" and, at least in the European mindset of the eighteenth century, the Muslim world as a whole (*Infidels* 265).

The Oriental appearance of the chess player's clothing, the fact that he was and remains known as "the Turk," and the Islamic-inspired detailing in posters announcing the shows also imply an association between machines and the exotic ethnic that functions in an analogous way to the cultural tendency to portray *Maschinenmenschen* as machine-women. This association of machines with the exotic and the mysterious highlights European fantasies of the Other and exposes cultural undercurrents that connect not only women

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but also ethnic Others via the common denominator of instinctual, irrational, and even perverse qualities. These traits were attributed to both women and stereotypically perceived foreign ethnicities. For instance, in a discussion of Lohenstein's "lurid dramas," Todd Kontje describes portrayals of "Oriental despots as debauched hermaphrodites" (13). In a similar sense, the chess player evokes associations with the unnatural, as exhibited through the artifice of man-made machinery, which complemented the inhuman(e) characteristics also historically associated with Turkishness at the time.

In the context of the chess-playing automaton, a few other historical and cultural factors mingle with and overlay the collective European image of Turks as warlike and inhumane. After a series of bloody wars that spanned the bulk of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and many European courts eventually commenced with the signing of various treaties meant to end hostilities, including the Treaty of Belgrade with the Habsburgs in 1739. This instance is of particular note, since the treaty was signed a year before Maria Theresa's reign began and heralded a time that would know unprecedented peace with the Ottomans. However, along with the decades of peace it portended, the Belgrade treaty also required that the Habsburgs cede the Kingdom of Serbia along with Belgrade, as well as parts of northern Bosnia, territories that Maria Theresa's father Charles VI had won from the Ottomans in the Austro-Turkish war of 1716–1718.

Despite this loss of territory, subsequent visitations of Ottoman diplomats to the courts of Europe after the Belgrade treaty inspired an interest in "Turkish" styles of clothing and music, which were by then seen as elegant and exotic rather than fearsome and suspicious. According to one historical account of the chess-playing Turk's initial appearance in Maria Theresa's court in 1770:

> [The automaton] consisted of a wooden cabinet, behind which was seated a life-size figure of a man, made of carved wood, wearing an ermine-trimmed robe, loose trousers, and a turban [...]. This choice of outfit was also highly fashionable at the time; [and] with its alluring combination of elegance and exoticism, was wildly popular in Vienna, where it was all the rage to drink Turkish coffee, dress one's servants in Turkish costumes, and appreciate the addition of supposedly Turkish touches (such as drums and cymbals) to contemporary music. (Standage 22–23)

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After relations with the Ottoman Empire normalized, the idea of the "kinder, gentler" Turk began to proliferate in Europe and at least partially replace the scimitar and attendant associations with nasty, warlike behavior, although these older images remained in the collective cultural memory due to the longstanding bloody conflicts that had occurred in prior decades.

As Michael Yonan points out in his study of Maria Theresa, Austria itself held a unique position, both geographically and culturally, between East and West in Europe, because Vienna was, "at once European and yet on the border of Europe, western in orientation and yet an empire encompassing many eastern lands" (136). Despite, or perhaps because of, wars between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans that had spanned more than two hundred years and due to its spatial contiguity to Turkish territories, Austria had a heightened and sustained level of interaction with the Ottomans that surpassed that of other European powers. This interaction "affected all kinds of Habsburg cultural products," including the Oriental style of decor featured in Maria Theresa's own reception room, perhaps the very room where von Kempelen's Turk automaton saw its first public chess match. Now called the "Millionenzimmer" due to the expense it must have been incurred in its installation in the 1750s, the room's rosewood inlaid walls frame row upon row of miniature paintings depicting the Indo-Persian courts of the Mughal Empire, which would have represented "a generalized Asian East" in the European imaginary of the period (Yonan 135). Likewise, a well-known painting of Maria Theresa in her later years depicts the empress in richly accessorized Turkish style garments (149). Yonan argues that the display of Islamic-inflected decor and dress "meant something different in Vienna than it did in the urban centers of the West. Vienna's proximity to that world lent Islamic objects and fashions a heightened aura, a special significance, that transformed *turquerie* into a statement of political vibrancy" (137).

The chess-playing automaton in Maria Theresa's court therefore emerges as a network of multivalent associations for his original audience. On the one hand, he represented the height of fashionable visual style—a kind of conquering through appropriation—but on the other, he embodied visual signifiers that touched on generations of fearful collective memory. Nevertheless, Maria Theresa herself, who had received the Turkish delegation sent to ratify the Treaty of Belgrade very early in her time on the throne and, with them, assurances that the Turks were no longer a great threat to Austria, possessed "a sense of gratitude to Turkey that was to endure throughout her reign"

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(Crankshaw 67). Given that fact and the record of her personal aesthetic choices, she must have taken some delight in the Turk's Oriental appearance.

The game itself, chess, was also of Oriental origin, so its history bears mentioning here in relation to von Kempelen's automaton. As described above, chess is essentially martial in its premise. The game entered Europe via the Byzantine Empire at some point between 600 and 1000 CE, having likely originated in India and Persia. In fact, the German word for chess, *Schach*, comes directly from the Persian word *shah*, meaning "king." Fittingly, the game first achieved popularity in Europe's royal class during the middle ages (Forbes 208). By the latter part of the eighteenth century, competitive chess was beginning to sweep Europe, with chess clubs forming as a pastime activity for the nobility and others who could afford to devote significant free hours to such a pursuit. Thus, throughout its history in Europe, the game retained a little of the flavor of its Oriental roots, so the pairing of a turban-wearing Turk with this game would have seemed fitting.

As described by Windisch and many others, the main portion of von Kempelen's "show" involved challenging an audience member to play against his creation (8–12). In the interest of time and audience attention spans, the Turk and his opponent played out the opponent's choice of one of several preconfigured "endgame" board spreads lasting around thirty minutes each (Cook 38). In a sense, these confrontations continually reenacted the scenarios that had happened on battlefields just a few decades before, with Europeans pitted against an inscrutable—and in this case literally inhuman—Islamic-styled "foe." Interestingly, it seems from various accounts that the Turk nearly always beat his opponent. In the initial presentations of the Turk in court, we can imagine a kind of playful optimism at the opportunity to reimagine and symbolically win past martial oppositions against the Ottomans, but what kind of nostalgia ensued when it became obvious that the Turk (or whatever entity was controlling him) was a master chess player who could not be beaten? From a Habsburg perspective, this "fort-da" scenario of constant and compulsively reenacted loss mirrors the brutal history of loss associated with wars against the Turks—if not a loss of territory each time, at the very least a continual loss of Austrian lives over the decades and centuries. In a sense, the chess scenario brings into stark relief the darker side of nostalgia detailed above. Ultimately, all nostalgia has a certain "fort-da" character to it. We constantly seek the pleasurable re-creation of a simulated time and place to relieve our longing, but the experience of that simulation is always already

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incomplete, inherently producing the desire to get another nostalgic "fix." Games, as we know now most acutely with the advent of video games, also breed addiction, partly fueled by the fact that no possibility of a final, definitive win actually exists. More games, more players, better moves, more territories to conquer always lurk on the horizon.

The Turk, Magic, and Science

As a result of the Turk's compelling appearances at court and the astonishment and curiosity that spread soon thereafter, the game was afoot. Von Kempelen took the Turk show on the road to other major European cities, and at this point, numerous articles marveling at the apparent ingenuity of von Kempelen's illusion appeared in several countries, each offering explanations of greater or lesser plausibility. These articles recounted in obsessive detail the visual presentation with special emphasis on the exposure of the machine's inner workings (Windisch 10). Indeed, we could even say that the recurring attempt to expose the Turk's secret became a game of its own. Von Kempelen, however, guarded his secret closely, so these articles only provided speculation. As all other previously observed automata had performed repetitive movements or had been quickly exposed as definitive hoaxes, explanations eventually faltered as to how von Kempelen's machine could play so skillfully, and, in some of these accounts, the chess player's ingenuity was attributed simply to "an unknown directing force" of unspecified nature (Standage 35). More fantastical speculations ranged from magnetism, to tiny invisible puppet strings, to a chess-playing monkey that was reported to have appeared in the court of the Sultan of Baghdad several months earlier (Dutens 11).

The idea of this "unknown directing force" that could not quite be explained feeds into notions of the exotic and the occult that were underscored by the Turk's elegant and enigmatic foreign appearance (Wood 61). At this point in history, machines themselves retained a certain exotic or magical quality. As Catherine Liu points out, "automata crystallize a certain Enlightenment moment when the machine was not yet completely subordinated to the forces of industry" (87). Von Kempelen is said to have played up this ambiguous amalgam of mechanical and magical elements in his presentations of the automaton. Of course he included the aforementioned flourish of winding the mechanism, which produced an audible clockwork ticking sound (Standage 28). Yet he also periodically peered into an ornately carved wood-

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en box, its contents concealed from an audience left to assume that this box contained some magical or highly advanced technological device by which he controlled the Turk's movements (29). Historian James Cook calls this part of the presentation "a Barnumesque gesture of misdirection, designed to invite suspicion and convert the automaton's public identity from that of one-dimensional machine into a multi-dimensional machine-puzzle" (48).

The combination of metallic clockwork and the notion of a "ghost in the machine" would not have been incompatible at a time when court performances like von Kempelen's tended to straddle the line between magic and science. Indeed, various versions of the inventor's story recount an occurrence between von Kempelen and Maria Theresa, wherein both witnessed a performance involving experiments (tricks?) with magnetism by a Frenchman named Pelltier, and von Kempelen proposed that he could perform a far greater illusion, namely the Turk. Meanwhile, the audience's general association of mysterious occult practices with the Muslim religion would have contributed to the perceived "authenticity" of this performance even as it reinforced the aforementioned negative images conjured up by the Turk's appearance or, as Gaby Wood writes, "a particular kind of Orientalist fantasy: the unknown, the spirit-like forces of darkness, came dressed in the attire of the East" (61).

For her part, Maria Theresa shunned superstition and went so far as to launch a campaign against belief in ghosts, witches, and the like, which included the banning of occult-related books (Crankshaw 309). It can thus be assumed that the empress herself gave no credence to the whispers of dark powers at play between von Kempelen and the Turk. Given that she also supported advances in science, technology, and innovation despite her misgivings about the perceived anti-religious bent of Enlightenment thought, her interest in the Turk and explanations of its function would have been pragmatic in nature. Like the rest of the audience, however, the ingenuity of the illusion must have thrilled her regardless, since it surely bested Pelltier's magnetism performance by miles.

The Turk's precise position between science and magic, between rationality and superstition, provides us with a unique lens through which to view some inherent contradictions of the Enlightenment. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno point out in their initial chapter of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Enlightenment thought falters on its continual collapse into the very myths and superstitions that it sought to overcome through reason:

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> [A]s the magical illusion fades away, the more relentlessly in the name of law repetition imprisons man in the cycle—that cycle whose objectification in the form of natural law he imagines will ensure his action as a free subject. [. . .] That arid wisdom that holds there is nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played, and all the great thoughts have already been thought, and because all discoveries can be construed in advance and all men are decided on adaptation as the means to self-preservation—that dry sagacity merely reproduces the fantastic wisdom that it supposedly rejects[.] (12)

The suspicion surrounding the Turk, as well as the obsessive attempts at explanation and exposure that he sparked, capture this dynamic exactly in that they all fall back repeatedly into pure speculation, which requires precisely the leap of faith that these explanations purport to dispel. Indeed, both the "rational" attempts at explanation and the resort to "unknown forces" require a certain blind acceptance. The simulated nature of a game scenario, alluded to specifically in this passage from Horkheimer and Adorno, highlights the inherent artifice of the Enlightenment faith in the rational above all else. The attempt to explain away the illusion of the Turk required submission to an illusion of another sort. Whether one believed in magic or science as an explanation for von Kempelen's creation, the willing submission to an illusion of one sort or another was part of the game. The Turk is truly an Enlightenment machine in every sense: It evoked simultaneously an obsessive rationality and a willful giving of oneself over to illusion, thus extending the "fort-da" repetition to the level of Enlightenment thought as a perpetually unwinnable game.

Habsburg Nostalgia

Perhaps biographies of Maria Theresa and studies of the Habsburg monarchy fail to note the Turk's appearance at court because weightier matters took precedence in 1770. The potential encroachment of Catherine's Russian forces onto the Habsburgs' doorstep to the East involved parts of those same disputed Ottoman territories, Wallachia and Moldavia, that were first gained and then lost again by Maria Theresa's father Charles VI. That moment in Maria Theresa's reign presented possible avenues for regaining the lost lands, but the majority of these options would also lead to war. Based on her desire to main-

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tain the peace that had been established when those territories were ceded back to the Ottomans in 1739, Maria Theresa instead relented to cooperate with her old archenemy Friedrich of Prussia on a controversial strategy, brokered by her son Joseph II and her foreign minister Wenzel Anton Kaunitz, to appease the Russians with the partition of Poland. Maria Theresa was "passionately opposed to any territory being seized from the Turks," and made her wishes plain (Beales 294). The reluctance of the empress to consent to any plan to expand Habsburg territories bespeaks of a humane leader who wished to spare her country unnecessary bloodshed and monetary expense.

Rather like a chess game but far less amusing, the negotiations that led to this outcome are documented by historians as a series of moves and countermoves between Maria Theresa and her own son (Beales; Crankshaw). We might, as James Cook contends, see the automaton's Turkishness rather unambiguously as "a symbolic adversary existing outside of, and in opposition to, the dominant Christian-scientific ethos of the Enlightenment," representing a longer history that defined Austria in contrast to the Ottomans (43). This position, however, is not consistent with Maria Theresa's immediate reality at the time. That the evenings with the Turk's games in her court occurred at this particular period, likely even in an Oriental-styled room, holds some significance in this context. Despite the martial connotations of the game of chess, the presence of a Turk in court, mechanical or otherwise, must have underscored for Maria Theresa her role as peacekeeper. Rather than a nostalgia for a glorious triumphalist past, the Turk surely evoked a "homesickness" for a peaceful golden age she hoped would not suddenly end. Maria Theresa envisioned a different sort of *felix Austria* ("happy Austria") from the one that had so long been defined in strict opposition to the Turks (Wheatcroft, *The Habsburgs* 182–83). Based on what we know of Maria Theresa and her time, her position on the Turks in relation to Austria had more to do with maintaining the present peace than reliving past glories. Meanwhile, the friendly games stood in stark contrast to the extensive machinations then required of a female monarch in order to assert herself (and surely she appreciated the important role of the Queen in chess). In keeping with female conventions of time that required a certain level of deprecation, at times Maria Theresa wielded her power behind the scenes, not unlike the Turk's hidden operator.

As for the Turk, his career extended far beyond the court of Vienna. Despite, or perhaps because of, the controversy about whether he was indeed a true machine or an ingenious hoax, he played a distinct role in the

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development of popular culture and mass attractions in Europe well into the nineteenth century. After his stint in the courts of Europe accompanied by von Kempelen, the inventor disassembled the automaton and stored the Turk at Schönbrunn. The automaton was eventually sold to an inventor named Johann Maelzel sometime after Vienna fell to Napoleon's army in 1809 (Standage 102–3). Maelzel reassembled the Turk and once again took him on tour in Europe and eventually the United States. It was at this point in the Turk's career that he seemed to spark still more obsessive attempts to explain the secret of the "unknown force" controlling the automaton's movements. This desire to possess the Turk's secret is captured in fiction in E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1814 story "Die Automate," in which the main automaton character is clearly patterned after von Kempelen's automaton. The obvious association with von Kempelen's famous hoax adds to the air of doubt and wonder surrounding this literary automaton, since the Turk had, at that point, not yet been conclusively exposed as a hoax. Likewise, many other converging factors—the initial wonder evoked by the automata as a whole, their later run-down archaic shabbiness, a history of fraudulence and hoax, and finally the shady taint of sideshow kitsch—made him a fascinating subject.

The public's desire to see human facsimiles acting out fantastic or historical scenarios did not abate with the decline of the automaton age. The singular automata created by inventors like von Kempelen gave way to mass-produced penny fortune-telling machines and the like, which themselves sometimes featured Islamic-styled ethnic others from a nostalgic bygone era when, one might imagine, magic still reigned. Other later automata featured historic battle tableaux, which the viewer could experience in simulation for a coin or two. These mass amusements existed side by side with stroboscopes and other early forays into the moving image. Therefore, the Turk takes part in a series of entertainment forms that led directly to the development of cinema; like viewers of early film, the Turk's audience gave themselves over willingly to the illusion of simulation.

As laid out in the beginnings of this study, nostalgia requires a similar submission to illusion. In its modern sense, nostalgia is closely aligned with a form of "homesickness," that is to say a longing for a time, place, or experience to which one no longer has access except through simulation. The nostalgic reconstruction proposes a cure by allowing the audience to experience that originary moment in narrative form. The Turk demonstrates this process, since part of his attraction in the Austria of his origins must have been

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the nostalgic associations offered by a game simulation of a very real history of wars between the Austrians and the Ottomans, as well as by the compulsion to play despite continual losses. Susan Stewart points out the similarly unwinnable aspect of nostalgic narrative more generally: in purporting to simulate the past, nostalgia supports "the historical tendency toward the self-sufficient machine," which is to say, the illusion of authority without an author (11). The Turk embodies this concept in its crystallization of the inherent contradictions of the Enlightenment insistence on rationality, which itself becomes a kind of self-perpetuating illusion that functions by concealing its own illusory methods. Stuart refers here to the illusory nature of filmic nostalgia in particular, but the analogy extends to nostalgic texts in general as a kind of unwinnable game. Yet the Turk was ultimately not a self-sufficient machine, despite the ingenuity of the illusion. He required the presence of von Kempelen, and as was later discovered, the chess whiz hiding in the cabinet among the gears.

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